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RECENT PUBLICATIONS
beliefs, crying, consoling, and confiding in each other. The main challenge was to remain sane and loyal to their essence of humanity as they endured the physical and psychological torture and the divide and conquer policies of the prison authorities. “We kept making new friends and bonding in ways that people in ordinary circumstances would not truly understand, and the guards kept separating us” (p. 192), and “exchanging letters from prison to prison was an achievement” (p. 194). The list of prohibited activities that women prisoners had to abide by was long and included reading (except for religious books and the Qur'an), sewing and embroidery, stone and bone carving, painting and drawing, and writing” (p. 112). The book contains a number of prison letters, journals, poems, official papers, and images of creative items made secretly in prison despite these prohibitions.

Finding meaning to life in prison and maintaining a daily routine of work, exercise, and play kept the women prisoners alive and sustained their defiance. These “seemingly small things were great sources of joy and pleasure. Apart from providing me with the means to keep busy in a meaningful way, they were signs that the domain of the enemy was not as invulnerable as it seemed. We could still get some of the things we wanted despite the walls, bars, and weapons” (p. 192). Parsi adds that “the embroidery thread and blue fabric in my hand told me that even though we looked captured and trapped, there were ways to conquer the enemy” (p. 192).

The last part of the book details the physical and psychological impact of being in prison, and the consequences of life upon release. “All of the scars are still there. There are certain depths of pain that, once experienced, transform people forever” (p. 197). The authors question what it means to be released from prison. “So it wasn’t a real release after all. They would still keep a close eye on me, not letting me forget that absolute freedom from the boundaries and limitations of this regime would never happen” (p. 219). This section also records the coping mechanisms and resistance employed by the prisoners’ families. Parsi describes how her mother coped with her imprisonment through writing, knitting sweaters, and keeping a journal. “It moves from tears and pain and helplessness, to anger and rebellion... Through this notebook, I can feel the sharp pang of pain that pierced her soul, the roller coaster she rode for five years” (p. 190). Life after prison entailed guilt and a societal gap that was hard to bridge. “I couldn’t imagine how to fill in the five-year gap that stretched between my family and myself. It seemed like an impossible task... Could I live a normal life?” (p. 215). Reconnecting remains a challenge, but with time, meaning, work, and unconditional love, the women continued to cope and resist. They lived to tell.

Iris Nusair, International Studies and Women’s Studies, Denison University

IRAQ


Reviewed by Eric Davis

Iraqi officials often deny the existence of sectarianism in Iraq. Conversely, Western analysts often view Iraq as an artificial nation comprised of an amalgam of mutually conflicting ethnoconfessional groups. A binary that presents Iraq as either devoid of or consumed by sectarian identities is obviously conceptually flawed. In Sectarianism in Iraq, Fanar Haddad seeks to expand our understanding of this difficult and complex topic.

Drawing upon symbolic anthropology, cultural analysis, and post-modernism, the author develops a sophisticated analytic framework that emphasizes the identity of the post-Gulf War Uprising (Intifada) of 1991, the 2003 American invasion, and what the author terms the “civil war” that developed in the wake of the invasion to frame his study.

Sectarianism in Iraq is particularly insightful when examining the changing nature of social and political identities. The negative legacy of Saddam Husayn’s political manipulation of ethnoconfessional identities, especially during the 1990s UN sanctions regime, was compounded after 2003 by a weak state that has consistently failed to exercise the leadership needed to promote social trust and national reconciliation. The author deftly analyzes how Shi’a identities following 2003 have come to reflect the overuse of Sunni Arab identities prior to 2003. The once dominant Sunni Arab political community now expresses themes of marginalization and victimization similar to those formerly expressed by Shi’a.

Sectarianism in Iraq exhibits conceptual parallels with Kanan Makiya’s Republic of Fear. While offering a trenchant critique of Ba’thist rule, Makiya presented Saddam’s regime as so powerful as to create an aura of its invincibility. In the process, Makiya inadvertently provided Saddam’s regime with support since his analysis suggested that efforts to overthrow it were futile. Likewise, Sectarianism in Iraq presents a picture of post-1991 (and especially post-2003) Iraq in which sectarian identities have paralized state and society. The volume leaves the reader with the feeling that Iraq suffers from a social disease that can never be cured.

In presenting a partial analysis, the author offers a theory that is conceptually monochromatic, half of the dialectic as it were. On one hand, he is extremely thorough in demonstrating state discrimination against the Shi’a since the modern state’s founding in 1921. However, the study says virtually nothing about the powerful nationalist movement that emerged after WWI which fought to promote a national sense of Iraqi identity and to unite Iraqis of all ethnic and confessional origins.

The historical memory of that movement still lives. As the author himself notes, a Rwandas-style genocide could never occur in Iraq (p. 54). Yet he never explains what factors lead some Iraqis to construct what he aptly terms a “myth-symbol complex” based in sectarianism as opposed to one that is grounded in a sense of national Iraqi identity.

Consequently, Sectarianism in Iraq cannot explain why Iraqis celebrated an massacre Iraq’s unexpected victory in the 2007 Asia Cup, or why Iraqi Shi’a and Sunnis (and even Arabs and Kurds) still intermarry. It offers little insight into why public opinion polls consistently show that Iraqis view unemployment and lack of social services as far more important problems than sectarianism. It cannot tell us why Rashid al-Khayyun’s Against Sectarianism (Didd al-To’iyya) was one of the most popular books at this past summer’s Baghdad Book Fair.

The author cannot explain why so many Iraqis still keep a photograph of Gen. ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim in their home or work. Qasim, the only modern Iraqi leader to rule in a non-sectarian manner (1959–1963), is still beloved for his commitment to social justice for all Iraqis, regardless of ethnoconfessional background. Clearly, Qasim’s continued valorization provides an important insight into what Iraqis desire in a ruler today.

Nor does the author analyze the role of cross-cutting cleavages — based in social class, education, gender, generation, and ideology — in creating conflict within ethnoconfessional groups. For example, the mercantile middle classes, that form the social base for Nuri al-Maliki’s Da’wa Party/State of Law Coalition, fear their fellow Shi’a in the populist Sadrist Movement, which is rooted in the urban and rural poor, much more than any Sunni Arab political movement. Despite being viewed as anti-Shi’a, the Ba’th Party’s first two leadership cadres were dominated by Shi’a, under Fu’ad al-Rikabi in the 1950s and ‘Ali Salih al-Sa’di (a Paylî Kurd) in the 1960s. If sectarian identities were as pronounced as the author implies, it is difficult to explain why 50% of Saddam’s praetorian guard, the Fadayeen Saddam, were Shi’a.

What Sectarianism in Iraq fails to adequately clarify is the distinction between secular and religious Shi’a, as well as between middle and upper class and poor Shi’a. The author demonstrates that hostility to the Shi’a — under Ba’th Party rule and prior regimes — was based in the fear that the Najaf Hawza represented a “fifth column” intent on promoting Iranian influence in Iraq, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Historically, regime discrimination against the Shi’a seems to have been more directed against the clerical class than educated secular Shi’a, many of whom were Ba’th Party members.

This study fails to focus on the contestation between Iraqis who view sectarianism as socially destructive (evident in my research among Iraqi youth, in the activities of many
civil society organizations, and in the arts, such as the film, Baghdad High), and sectarian entrepreneurs (elites) who promote sectarian identities to advance narrowly defined political and economic agendas. As such, it tells us little about the possibilities for change, whether leading towards national reconciliation or towards further social and political decay. By ignoring the inner dynamics of Iraq’s main ethnoconfessional groups, we cannot understand how cross-ethnic political coalitions might develop in the future, such as the al-Isra’iyya Coalition that won the March 2010 parliamentary elections with support from secular Sunni Arabs, Shi’a, and even a significant number of Kurds.

Finally, a more appropriate title for this study would be Sectarianism in Arab Iraq. The Kurds (and minority groups), while 20% of the population, are given no voice in this volume. As is well known, Saddam’s genocidal “Anfal” campaign against the Kurds (not mentioned at all) was couched in a sectarian discourse.

Fanar Haddad has tackled one of the most difficult aspects of Iraqi politics and society, providing numerous insights and a rich empirical data base. What this study underscores is both the complexity of the question of sectarian identities in Iraq and how much research is still needed on this critical topic.

Eric Davis, Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, and former director of its Center for Middle Eastern Studies, is author of the forthcoming Taking Democracy Seriously in Iraq.

ISRAEL


Reviewed by Chuck Freilich

Daniel Byman’s A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism — much more than a book about terrorism — is a history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which terrorism has played such a central role. Byman’s fundamental argument is straightforward: Israel is an international laboratory for terrorism and counterterrorism (CT), and both its successes and failures can provide an invaluable guide to all countries confronting the issue today. As he notes, virtually every CT tactic employed by the US in recent years was invented and tried first by Israel.

The book highlights a number of important truths and dilemmas. Arab terrorism predates Israeli independence and reflects a fundamental hostility to its existence, not just, or even primarily, a reaction to the occupation of 1967 and settlements — the justification typically professed by Palestinians. Palestinian terrorists, including suicide bombers, are not necessarily poor, uncultured misfits, or religious fanatics, but often the opposite, and it is hatred, rather than deprivation, that drives them. Israel’s successes in the battle against terrorism have stemmed not from the occasional spectacular exploit, such as the Entebbe operation in 1976, so much as from the cumulative effect of painstaking intelligence gathering and a ceaseless stream of small, low profile, interdiction and disruption operations carried out over years.

Conversely, as Byman stresses, some of Israel’s CT efforts have failed and even been counter-productive. Its successful expunction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon in 1982 had the unintended consequence of creating a vacuum in which a far more intractable and lethal enemy, Hizbullah, arose. Israel’s heavy response to the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 may have increased the overall ensuing level of violence. The unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 strengthened Hizbullah and Hamas, respectively, by ostensibly “proving” that terrorism had succeeded in driving Israel out, whereas the negotiated approach favored by moderates had failed to produce the desired outcomes. Counterterrorism deterrence requires a disproportionate response, but Israel’s enemies have a higher threshold for pain than it does, so it often fails. Israel has often gone to great lengths to minimize civilian losses during CT operations, including the 2008 Cast Lead Operation in Gaza, but has repeatedly lost the “PR war,” with severe consequences for its international standing. In a changing international environment, terrorists “win” when the civilian populations in which they shelter suffer losses.

Above all, Byman stresses the absence of a coherent overall strategy guiding Israel’s CT operations, i.e. the nearly exclusive focus on CT, as opposed to a comprehensive political-military insurgency policy, and the lack of sufficient integration — at times even conflict — between these operations and Israel’s broader national security objectives. While right on both accounts, this raises two crucial points: The dubious success of the much vaunted American counter-insurgency policy in Iraq and Afghanistan and conversely the fact that Israel has won two major battles against terrorism, resoundingly defeating the second Intifada and keeping terrorism generally to a level which has not prevented it from thriving as a nation. In so doing, it has certainly raised questions regarding the “common wisdom” whereby conventional militaries cannot defeat terrorism.

The final chapter on the lessons from the Israeli experience makes a number of interesting observations, but does not do justice to this otherwise outstanding study. Partly this may be because the book, having described the history of Israel’s CT efforts in minute detail, does not tie it all together in an overall conceptual depiction of Israel’s CT strategy. The absence thereof reflects reality, in the sense that Israel has apparently not formulated a formal and written CT doctrine, much as it has not done so in other areas of national security, but Byman has all of the elements in place and turning them into a conceptual whole would serve as a “blueprint” for other countries engaged in CT.

Byman is even-handed to a fault. In a book about Israeli CT, two full chapters and numerous other references are devoted to Jewish terrorism. In writing a book about US CT policy, it is doubtful whether such attention would have been given to American terrorists. There is also a danger that the presentation of the endless tit-for-tat cycle of terrorist act and CT response, will inure some readers to the heinous character of the actions that caused it.

A High Price is an exhaustively searched and painstakingly detailed a dime tome, but reads like a virtual s thriller. Both experts in the field and general readers interested in terrorism, Israel and the Mideast, will find the book highly informative.

Chuck Freilich, a senior fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, was a deputy ional security adviser in Israel. His boo. The Thundering Present: National Secur: Decision Making in Israel is forthcoming (Cornell University Press, 2012).


Reviewed by Matthew Hughes

In 2004, New Left Review published an interview under the title “On Ethnic Clea the prominent Israeli “new” torian, Benny Morris, in which he said that Israel’s mistake was not to expel all the Palestinians when the J ish state was formed in 1948. The 150, or so Palestinians who remained after war of 1948 increased naturally, sust numbers to this day at around 15-20% the population, representing a ticking “bomb” in the heart of the Jewish state, cording to Morris. Affected by the ev surrounding the second Intifada of 2000 the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace t Morris had had some sort of an epip and had come to the conclusion that it impossible to do political business with Palestinians — or, indeed, Arabs in ge. Leaving to one side the uncomfor moral issue of what Morris was suggest — unless, that is, one is committed to et cleansing, which some are — his argu has historical weight. When a domin more powerful, colonial culture, mon especially one driven by settlers, has col with a weaker indigenous community result had usually been the absorption struction, or expulsion of the local pe Whether settler-led or not, colonial co